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# LETTER

FROM A

GENTLEMAN AT BENGAL,

TO HIS

FRIEND IN LONDON;

DATED CALCUTTA, SEPT. 8, 1787.

Received by the RAVENSWORTH PACKET.

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR JOHN STOCKDALE, OPPOSITE  
BURLINGTON-HOUSE, PICCADILLY.

M.DCC.LXXXVII.

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[ Price One Shilling. ]



*Extract of a Letter from the Author,  
in Calcutta, to the Publisher.*

Calcutta, 8th Sept. 1787.

“ Dear SIR,

“ T H I S letter has been writ-  
“ ten in a great hurry; but, if you  
“ think it worth publishing, I de-  
“ sire it may be printed correctly,  
“ without communication with any  
“ one person, or admitting the least

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“ altera-

[ iv ]

“ alteration; and under the title of  
“ *A Letter from Bengal, received by*  
“ *the Ravenfworth packet.*”

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*N. B.* The original letter is in the hands of the  
publisher, and may be seen by any gentleman who  
has curiosity to inspect the manuscript.

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L E T T E R, &c.

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Dear SIR,

**G**AMBLING, you know, is against law; yet I have ventured to wager one thousand Gold Mohurs,\* that, notwithstanding the malice of Mr. FRANCIS in pointing out the mistaken zeal of Mr. BURKE in collecting

\* See the Indian Vocabulary.

matter of charge from the Company's records, the tragical passion, stirring and stage-trick eloquence of Mr. SHERIDAN, in describing the supposed high crimes and misdemeanours of Mr. HASTINGS, yet that great and much-injured Gentleman will be honourably acquitted in the House of Lords.

At the bar of that awful tribunal, the dernier resort of honor in the British constitution, a person in Mr. HASTINGS's situation may expect impartial justice: if not, adieu to all hope of future exertion of

great abilities in the cause of our country, where the honor of the flag, nay, the salvation of the empire, may chance again to depend on prompt decision, accompanied by such dangerous responsibility. But issue has long since been joined, and before this can reach you, a decision may have taken place, productive of dishonor to an amiable individual, and the first political officer the British nation has to boast, and hand down to posterity one more instance of the pernicious influence of party rage in popular governments.

How

How very different are *our* sentiments in Bengal, of the real character of Mr. HASTINGS, when compared to the general opinion formed of it in England, from hearing and reading that extraordinary composition of delusive eloquence, prepared, studied, and delivered with every art of dramatic action, by Mr. SHERIDAN, in the House of Commons.—We here are apt to look back to our situation in the middle of the late extensive and destructive war, and to contemplate Mr. HASTINGS in his nominal character of Governor-

General

General of the British possessions in India; for he had to contend with a powerful majority in his own Council, who thwarted all his measures.—In vain he appealed to Europe for better support; the national councils were as much embarrassed as his own, and by the very men who have since coalesced with his Asiatic opponents to bring about his ruin.—We cannot forget our apprehensions, from the consequences of the combination of powerful enemies, at that time formed on the continent of India, for the destruction of the British power in

Afia.

Asia. The well-known spirit, abilities and resources of the great mind of Mr. HASTINGS was at that period the only glimpse of hope we had to lean on, and he had to struggle, with an empty treasury and ruined credit, against the whole power of the Mahrattas, and of Hyder Ally Cawn, the insinuating policy of the French, agitated by the pleasing idea of revenge, and the phlegmatic malice of the Dutch, sustained by a land army of Europeans in good force, and a fleet destructive to our whole commerce, from the exertions of SUFFREIN,

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an able and enterprising sea officer, so eager in the pursuit of the destruction of the enemies of his country, as wantonly to forfeit his individual pretensions not only to Christian charity, but to common humanity.

Overwhelmed as Great-Britain then was, by having the whole civilized world in arms against her, to the exception of a few nations, whose cold, indifferent, and in some instances menacing neutrality, banished all expectation of assistance at home and abroad—how gloomy,

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how distressing our situation at Bengal, none can know but those who were on the spot; yet this persecuted man, Mr. HASTINGS, shrunk not from *his* charge, or for a moment despaired of the common cause. We follow him, in grateful contemplation, to the conclusion of the peace; and even now review, with astonishment, the powers of that mind, which had energy sufficient even to conceive the possibility of bringing about a general peace on the continent of India, without sacrificing a single province or fortress, possessed by the

the Company before the war, to  
the common enemy.

We are apt, in the moments of  
leisure, to compare the military re-  
turns of the armies in the pay of  
Great-Britain, acting during the  
late war, in Europe, Africa, Ame-  
rica, and the West-Indies, with the  
returns made from the different  
garrisons, presidencies and armies,  
in actual service at the same time  
in Asia, and are not a little sur-  
prized to find that the rank and  
file, or effective men of the latter,  
at all periods of the war exceed

those of the former. We remember, it was Lord NORTH who directed the operations of the first, and Mr. HASTINGS those of the last ; nor do we forget the enormous losses sustained of territory and of honor in the European department, and the little waste of either in the Asiatic. The former increased the national debt, one hundred and fifty millions ; the latter left the Company about seven millions in arrears,—a sum not amounting to eight months interest of your national debt, nor to two years receipt of the territorial revenue of the

Bengal

Bengal provinces only, preserved by Mr. HASTINGS's exertions in obedience to the British flag. Yet Lord NORTH stands not only exempt from persecution, but joins the cry to tear the unfading honor from the brows of a man, whose talents, and whose virtues, he could not imitate.—We consider, with no less pain than astonishment, the violent and vindictive ~~pefecution~~ of this great preserver of the British empire in the East: it seems to us, as if the Genius of ALBION had run mad, and, in her phrenzy, singled out the only fortunate

fortunate

tunate Minister during the late disgraceful and humiliating war, as worthy to be impeached of High Crimes and Misdemeanors, as if national disgrace could be hidden from posterity by national ingratitude.

Calm and serene, enjoying all the comforts of peace, nor apprehending the most distant interruptions to our commerce, or to our repose, from any power on the continent of India, whilst our rulers shall remain content with our present possessions, we should be base, even

even beyond your example, not to feel commiseration for the indignities and injuries heaped on the grey head of that man, whose magnanimity of soul procured us that peace, and that prospect of future happiness.

Conversing with the natives, there is no mode of expression in our language which they can be made to understand, nor in their own, which we have power to express or they to conceive, that can explain to them the cause of the present oppression and disgraceful

situation of Mr. HASTINGS. They solve it, in their way: "He must, (say they) by some criminal action unknown to us, have offended God's vicegerent on earth,—the great King GEORGE. He, as well as we, are but his Majesty's poor slaves, —whose will is the law, to which we must bow the neck and submit."

There is one circumstance in which all parties, and I believe all nations, who know the man, agree; that is, in the unspotted character of

of Lord CORNWALLIS. This Nobleman is in the peculiar situation of having little more to obtain in this life, and every thing to lose. He may be created a Duke, and gain two steps in advance of rank; but his measure of honor is already so brim-full, that Royal gratitude can but make it overflow. We have him then by the strongest of all human ties, self-preservation; in him, virtue itself may illustrate, though not encrease, the dignity of his character; but the least deviation from the strait line of rectitude would wither all his bays, and

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fully the lustre of his name to all eternity.

At the moment I am now writing, Lord CORNWALLIS is on his way from Benares to Allahabad, to Lucknow, to Furruckabad, to Cawnpore, and other stations. The provinces of Benares, of Oude, and of Rohilcund, will be crossed by him, in more directions than one. I know not what his Lordship's instructions may be from home, or whether he has been ordered to enquire after, or to investigate the truth of the heavy charges brought

brought forward against Mr. HASTINGS, on the subject of the Begums, of CHEYT SING, and of other princes and great men, said to have been oppressed and ruined by him ; but this I know, that the Begums are now alive, contented and happy. His Lordship neither can, nor will, shut his ears against the cries of oppression, or his eyes against the horrid waste and desolation of a country he is passing over, and which is described as depopulated by the most violent acts of tyrannic cruelty :—if he shall find cause to believe the charges true, but in a

certain degree—in him, silence would be a species of treason;—if false, his honor, his humanity, will not permit an innocent man to suffer unjustly, and be silent.—Truth and Justice may arrive too late to save an honest man's life, but his honor is at all times worth retrieving.

I am not in a sphere of life likely to be made acquainted with Lord CORNWALLIS's private sentiments on the above subjects; but if, by chance, I ever should come to know them, they will have more weight with

with me than fifty votes of your  
House of Commons.

The language of the heart doth  
very seldom attend the most capti-  
vating elocution in the House of  
Commons. Heaven forbid, that  
the son of CHATHAM should stoop  
to the base Plebeian passion of Envy !  
or that fear, or low jealousy, of the  
eminent talents and local know-  
ledge in Asiatic politics should,  
in Mr. HASTINGS, raise him up a  
competitor for power at the Board  
of Controul ! — Such grovelling  
ideas may operate on the cold sus-  
picious mind of the Northern

HARRY, and induce him to insinuate how easy it would be for them to prevent their master's intentions that way, by coalescing with the Coalition, and thereby bind in chains the constitutional right of the imperial CÆSAR.

It is not in nature, for man to act at all times with consistence of character, and it is to be lamented that so superior a genius as that of Mr. PITT, should be subject to that but too common weakness of the human mind. It is not possible, at this distance, for us to form any idea of his real opinion of Mr.

HASTINGS's

HASTINGS's character; but this is certain, he has most wantonly weakened, in this country, the good opinion we had of his own, by—giving up to the rage of his enemies a man, to whom his sovereign, GEORGE the Third, owes his having at this moment any dominion at all in this part of the world, and he himself the patronage which supports him in office.

I remain,

Dear SIR,

Your most obedient  
humble servant,

Calcutta,  
8th Sept. 1787,

*This Day is published, by JOHN STOCKDALE,  
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